HARAMBEE FLAME

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Responsibility or Burden by Mike Jones

"The Question." That's how I refer to it, the query that is posed to every journalist of African descent sooner or later. "Do you consider yourself a Black Journalist or a journalist who simply happens to be Black"? The Question.

This is not merely an exercise in word-play, nor a case of semantics. It strikes at the heart of how minority journalists perceive themselves, their profession, and their role in dealing with the racism that still exists in journalism. Yes, I said, "that still exists." Racism, sexism, and all those other -isms that plague our society exist just as surely in journalism as they do in the real world. Journalism is, afterall, a field which only reflects our society, as is the case with so many other professions.

In an issue of TV GUIDE, dated July 18, 1981, Richard Levine(a White reporter) wrote an article concerning the plight of Black television correspondents. It centered on those working at the network level. The article states, "though conceding some progress, Black correspondents believe the networks still practice some forms of racism." The article quotes Randy Daniels, then a reporter at CBS. Daniels says, "We're on the team, but we're not playing. We're in the dugout." The consensus of those interviewed: "the time of news outlets hiring and promoting Blacks has 'come and gone.'"

If the above is true at a network level, it is certainly true at a local level. The numbers give an indication.

In 1987, according to the Federal Communications Commission, minorities held 16% of all broadcasting jobs. If one narrows minorities to African Americans, the figure drops to 13%. If the jobs surveyed are limited to managerial positions, the figure drops to from 3 to 6%. Those figures have remained approximately the same since 1981. This is in spite of the number of minorities graduating in journalism each year.

Despite those graduates' efforts to enter the job market, the numbers remain static. The only conclusion can be that minorities are <u>not</u> being hired, or are being hired

only at a rate sufficient to fill the slots left by those minorities leaving the business.

If we consider only Nebraska(Omaha in particular), the numbers appear just as bleak. If we examine the history of broadcasting here and add the total number of African-Americans who have been hired or place in management or department-head positions, we arrive at a figure that, historically speaking, amounts to zero.

While most of these figures apply to television, the phenomena extend to all areas of journalism. The numbers are not there. But is it something about which we should be concerned? Should we expect news outlets to hire someone Black simply because "everyone should have one?" That brings us back to The Question.

The inherent fallacy with The Question is that it assumes that being Black and being a journalist are exclusive, that a person cannot be considered one and the other. It behooves African-American journalists to reject that notion as untrue. "Blackness" refers to one's identity. "Journalist" refers to one's profession. In order to be truly proficient in one's profession, an individual must have a sense of identity. Therefore, instead of being exclusive of each other, the terms can be considered essential to each other.

Unfortunately, many choose to deal with The Question by not dealing with it. They hope it will go away. In an article appearing in the CHICAGO TRIBUNE in July, 1986, Gail Christian(the first Black woman to work in Los Angeles television) notes that these days she "doesn't see Black Reporters being Black Reporters. I don't know what happened. I think since Blacks got back to straightening their hair that their brains started to straighten out in the process." In the same article, Ben Holman, another pioneer from Chicago, notes that many Black journalism students are motivated by seeing other Black men and women on television. Holman frets, "They don't know how those Black faces got there, and they're not terribly interested ...they worry that being Black is a minus."

These individuals miss the true value they can bring to the business of news. The African-American journalist represents a perspective that all too often has been missing. A different viewpoint, sensitivity to how African-Americans are portrayed, concern that the industry serve the public interest by addressing all parts of the community--these are all things that we can offer. And it is essential that we both be in the positions and use them to make these offerings, especially at a time when certain issues no longer seem to be on the nation's front-burners...issues such as racism, human rights, affirmative action and equal opportunity, the justice system. We can, in effect, help the profession become more committed, stronger, better.

It has been said that it is dangerous to live in a society where an entire class of people cannot interpret themselves. It is also dangerous to live in a society where one segment of that society is foreign to the other; where they only meet in crisis, each being ignorant.

Does all this mean that Black journalists should only be concerned with "Black issues" and not with other things in the community? Of course not. We cannot afford to cut ourselves off from the rest of the world. We would then become as guilty as those we would criticize for ignoring us and the reality that, what affects one segment of society, affects all. No, as African-American journalists, we cannot be restricted in our concerns to just "Black issues." Nor can we afford to turn our backs to the Black community.

Just as importantly, we must always be concerned with such things as being professional, capable, and good at our craft. This enhances our ability to offer something to this business and discredits the arguments used by those who would keep us out of the system. As to how I would answer The Question..."Am I a Black Journalist or a Journalist who is Black?" I'm both, and I like the way it feels.

-Mike Jones is a reporter for a television station in Omaha and an officer of the Omaha Association of Black Journalists.

What Is A Hero? by Assata Damani

A hero aint Superman, with a face of white, red stockings or tights, blue cape flying in the night. A hero aint Superman.

A hero is a 9-year-old youth playing in the park. He runs toward screams of alarm and rescues a little girl from harm.

A hero aint up in the sky--"It's a bird, it's a plane." A hero is not conscious that he is a hero. He denies that he gives of himself in many ways, in his actions and the things he says. A hero is not always a man but can be a woman, with banner in hand, singing songs that we shall overcome and won't stop till the battle is won. A hero is not always free in the eyes of others. He's held in confinement sometimes by bars, sometimes by stars, sometimes by gates and other weights, sometimes by guns, sometimes by laws and other flaws.

A hero is one who decides, "this is the day I will not stand or give my seat to a white man. This is the day I I will say that I cannot and will not compromise my freedom. I want my freedom with no attachment. I refuse to be pardoned for something I have not done."

A hero aint a hero for fun!

-Assata Damali Damani is a mother, worker, and student in Omaha.

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FLAME Editorial Policy

The HARAMBEE FLAME, the monthly publication of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization(parent chapter of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization, Inc.) is a pan-Africanist newsletter. This means that the FLAME's priority, with respect to news and views, is African people, events and developments which affect us and are, or should be, of concern to us. The FLAME does not recognize any artificial distinction between African people based solely on place of birth. Therefore, references to African people are made on the basis of our common ancestry. An exception to this policy is the reprinting of articles, or excerpts thereof, from other publications, in which cases we do not alter the terms used therein to fit our editorial policy.

Articles contained in the FLAME do not necessarily represent the official positions of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization unless they are accompanied by a statement identifying the views as being those of the organization. Generally speaking, all unsigned articles are by the editor, Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa(aka David Rice).

We encourage you to submit articles to the FLAME. Please enclose with your submission a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Articles should not exceed 900 words. Short stories are subject to the same restriction with respect to length. We also welcome poetry and graphics. Send your submissions to: HARAMBEE FLAME
Attn: Editor/Mondo
Harambee Afrikan Cultural Org.
P.O. Box 2500
Lincoln, NE 68502-0500

Note on poetry submissions: We are looking for poems that make effective use of imagery, that have beauty and power, and that do not sacrifice and of the above for the sake of rhyme and/or uniform rhythm patterns. Send stuff!

From Other Sources

Western Culture Program Attacked by Students

"In a struggle with national implications, Stanford students have forced the Faculty Senate to consider a proposal to revamp its freshman core curriculum.

"Every entering freshman must take the Western Culture program, the only required course for all Stanford students. Its core reading list is made up entirely of elite European, white male writers.

"The Black Student Union(BSU) has led the resistance to the course from its inception in 1980. In the past three years, the BSU - in coalition with MEChA, Asian American Students Association, Stanford American Indian Organization, and other progressive groups - have lobbied university committees, held public forums and engaged in public debate on campus and in the local media about the program.

"Through these efforts, Stanford was forced to appoint a special faculty-student task force to revise the program. The task force has devised a new program called Culture, Ideas and Values(CIV). CIV would eliminate the core list and mandate the study of at least one non-European culture, as a way of studying the diverse members of society and reflecting the changing U.S. population..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Stanford Students Hit Racist Requirement," which appears on page 4 of the Jan. 31 edition of UNITY.

F.B.I. Targets African Politicians

"...a white lawyer in Atlanta has revealed that agents there engaged in an 'extensive' bureau program of investigation 'without probable cause, of prominent elected and appointed Black officials in major metropolitan areas throughout the U.S.'...

"The policy was generally referred to by Atlanta Special

Agent John McAvoy, as 'Fruhmenschen'--a German word roughly translated as 'primitive man dating back to early homo sapiens'--according to published reports by columnists Ethel Payne in the WASHINGTON AFRO-AMERICAN and Dorothy Gilliam in the WASHINGTON POST...

"Friedman(the 'white lawyer in Atlanta' referred to in the first paragraph) risked much in revealing what he knows. On November 21, 1987--10 days before he filed his affidavit--when he turned on the ignition of his car, a bomb exploded. He lost his left leg."

-Above passages excerpted from "FBI 'Fruhmenschen' Operation," which appears on page 10 of the Feb. 5 edition of THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE.

Assata Shakur Living In Exile In Cuba

"Assata Shakur has been living quietly in Havana for several years, studying and writing, following her 1979 liberation from a New Jersey prison and a period of time underground.

"A leading figure in the Black liberation movement in the early 1970s and a target of the FBI's Cointelpro operation, Shakur(formerly Joanne Chesimard) was arrested in a May 1973 incident on the New Jersey Turnpike in which a state trooper was killed. She was convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment.

"While in prison, and particularly after she was freed in a dramatic jail-break, Shakur became a powerful symbol of the Black liberation movement and the government's attempt to destroy it...

"Shakur lives here(in Havana) with her daughter, Kakuya, who was born in prison and was 10 years old before she was finally able to live with her mother..."

-Above passages excerpted from "A Revolutionary Exile's Life Story," which appears on pages 1 and 17 of the Feb. 10 edition of THE GUARDIAN.

POST-WASHINGTON POLITICAL CONFLICT IN CHICAGO

"...This year anger over the bitter mayoral succession, six days after Harold Washington's death, may cause a black uprising against blacks.

"Ardent Washington supporters have kicked off what some describe as a crusade to dump black office-holders who want to rekindle machine politics or make deals with old-guard white colleagues who historically disenfranchised the black community.

"For starters, organizers have targetted for defeat in March 15 Democratic ward committeeman races three aldermen and the brother of a fourth alderman who voted with the city council's white ethnic bloc on December 2 to elect Ald. Eugene Sawyer acting mayor. Sawyer also faces a challenge to his bid to keep his committeeman post, which he has held since 1968...

"Petitions are circulating in the wards represented by Ald. William Henry, who orchestrated Sawyer's 29-19 victory, and Ald. Sheneather Butler, another Sawyer backer, asking that they voluntarily resign their council posts. In Henry's ward, about 8,000 registered voters have signed the petition. Residents of Butler's ward have launched a campaign to change state law to allow for recall of public officials..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Washington Supporters Target Defectors For Defeat," which appears on page 5 of the Feb. 10-16 edition of IN THESE TIMES.

Libya Hosts International Congress For The Liberation Of The Indian Peoples Of The Americas

"...Drawing over 150 Indian activists and leaders from throughout the Western Hemisphere and the Pacific Islands, the international gathering(in Tripoli, Jan. 30-Feb. 3) had been convened for the purpose of creating a global coordinating and leadership body for the Indian movement.

Support for such an organization was nearly unanimous...

"Most of the delegates...were longtime grassroots activists concerned with the cultural, political and economic survival of their respective peoples in the face of voracious landgrabbing schemes, forced cultural assimilation through the Indian 'education' system, and out-right genocide. Those present responded to the call put out by conference Chairman Bellecourt(WaBun-Inini of the Anishinabe Nation, aka Vernon Bellecourt, representative of the American Indian Movement) and other American Indian Movement and International Indian Treaty Council leaders to seize the historic opportunity to meet in Libya...

"Again and again Indian delegates at the Tripoli conference voiced their approval of the plan to form a fighting organization to support and coordinate the struggles of all indigenous peoples, whether they be for land, water and fishing rights in the U.S. or against the genocidal policies of neo-fascist regimes in Central and South America...

"The United Front for the Liberation of Indian Nations was born with many political conflicts which will require serious dialogue. Firstly, there is the Front's relationship to Mathaba.

"Mathaba is the Libyan led international front against imperialism. Ideologically rooted in Libyan leader Muammar El-Qaddafi's 'Third Universal Theory', a political hybrid composed mostly of Islam and a dash of the pro-capitalist writings of the 18th century French philosopher Rousseau, Mathaba is fundamentally a nationalist coalition, claiming the allegiance of over 300 liberation movements and progressive governments, including the Irish Republican Army, South Africa's African National Congress, the Nicaraguan Sandinistas and Islamic Moro separatists in the Philippines...

"Following a ringing introduction by conference Chairman and Anishinabe leader Bellecourt, Colonel Qaddafi, in a surprise appearance, gave a welcoming address...

"Qaddafi went on to urge an alliance between Indians and African-Americans and called for the partition of the U.S. into three separate states: Black, Red and white...

"Many contentious issues filled the People's Congress Center. The participation of Chicanos in the United Front remains an unresolved question, as does the role of spiritualism..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Indians Forge Global Liberation Front In Africa," which appears on pages 3 and 15 of the Feb. 19 edition of THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE.

U.S. Corporations To Pay For Doing Business in So. Africa

"Contrary to media reports, it wasn't snuck in under cover of darkness. But it will cost U.S. corporations doing business in South Africa several millions in additional taxes. And the political impact may be significant.

"The deficit reduction bill Reagan signed Dec. 22 included an amendment by Rep. Charles Rangel(D-N.Y.) that penalizes U.S. corporations operating in South Africa by subjecting them to double taxation...

"The Rangel measure bars U.S. companies from using the taxes paid by their South African subsidiaries as credits against their U.S. taxes as they have in the past. According to a congressional estimate, the total tax bill of the 152 affected *countries--those planning to continue doing business under the Botha/military regime--will increase by an essentially insignificant $20 million a year, although the combination of South African and U.S. taxes will raise their effective tax rates to a hefty 72%..."

-Above passages excerpted from "New Tax Undermines U.S. Business in S. Africa," which appears on page 9 of the Feb. 3 edition of THE GUARDIAN. *"Countries" is probably an error. "Companies" is probably the intended word.

Editor's note: Ordinarily "From Other Sources" is limited to information. The following sets of excerpts are presented because the views they offer are thought-provoking.

African Political Leadership in the U.S.

"...Black political leadership reveals the tame and genteel face of the Black middle class...Malcolm and Martin called for the realization that Black people were somebodies with which America has to reckon, whereas Black politicians tend to turn our attention to their somebodiness owing to their 'making it' in America...

"...What stood out most strikingly about Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Fanny Lou Hamer was that they were almost always visibly upset about the condition of Black America. When one saw them speak or heard their voice, they projected on a gut level that the Black situation was urgent, in need of immediate attention. One even gets the impression that their own stability and sanity rested on how soon the Black predicament could be improved. Malcolm, Martin, and Fanny were angry about the state of Black America and this anger fueled their boldness and defiance.

"In stark contrast, most present-day Black political leaders appear too hungry for status to be angry, too eager for acceptance to be bold, too self-invested in advancement to be defiant. And when they do drop their masks and try to get mad(usually in the presence of Black audiences), their bold rhetoric is more performance than personal, more play-acting than heartfelt. Malcolm, Martin, and Fanny made sense of the Black plight in a poignant and powerful manner, whereas most contemporary Black political leaders' oratory appeals to Black people's sense of the sentimental and sensational...

"Present-day Black political leaders can be grouped under three types: race-effacing managerial leaders, race-identifying protest leaders, and race-transcending prophetic leaders. The first type is growing rapidly. The Thomas Bradleys and Wilson Goodes of Black America have become a model for many Black leaders trying to reach a large

white constituency and keep a loyal Black one. This type survives on sheer political savvy and thrives on personal diplomacy. They are the kinds of candidate who are the lesser of two evils in political situations in which the only other electoral choice is a conservative(usually white) politician. Yet this type of leader tends to stunt progressive development and silence the prophetic voices in the Black community by casting the practical mainstream as the only game in town.

"The second type of Black political leader--race-identifying protest leaders--often view themselves in the tradition of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Fanny Lou Hamer. Yet they are usually self-deluded. Instead, they are much more in the tradition of Booker T. Washington, confining themselves to the Black turf, vowing to protect their leadership status over it, and serving as power brokers with powerful non-black(usually white economic or political elites, though in Louis Farrakhan's case it is Libyan elites) to enhance this Black turf... In short, race-identifying protest leaders in the post-Civil Rights era function as figures who white Americans must appease so that the plight of the Black poor is overlooked and forgotten. When such leaders move successfully into elected office--as with Andrew Young and Marion Barry--they usually become managerial types with large Black constituencies, flashy styles, flowery rhetoric, and Booker T. Washington-like patronage operations within the public sphere.

"Race-transcending prophetic leaders are rare in contemporary Black America...This void sits like a festering sore at the center of the crisis of Black leadership--and the predicament of the disadvantaged in the U.S. and abroad worsens.

-Above passages excerpted from "The Crisis Of Black Leadership" by Cornel West, which appears on pages 22-25 of the Feb. edition of ZETA MAGAZINE

Hair And Dignity

(There have been a number of cases recently in which African women in the U.S. have been fired from their jobs or otherwised penalized by employers for wearing cornrows or other braiding styles. Editor)

"...Like many Black women, I threw my pressing comb away during the Blacker than Black '60s. I vowed never to put one to my head again, nor would I take any daughter of mine through such dehumanizing agony. I am an avid cornrow wearer and will defend them down to the last row...

"Far from a passing 'fad', the history of African hair sculptures goes back thousands of years. Unlike most cultures, Africans rarely left their hair in its natural state. In ancient Africa, hairstyles were taken very seriously and would represent a particular class, tribe, age, occasion, etc,

"But the brutal suppression of African culture in the U.S. during slavery resulted in the wearing of hairstyles more acceptable to whites. Braids and nappy hair were often hidden under scarves, and later on, chemical processes were developed to straighten Black hair.

"...They(women of color) rarely get any reinforcement on the value of their own natural beauty, therefore they spend a lot of time and money on trying to become an image they can never be...

"...African heritage and culture must be restored to its just and rightful place. We should enjoy being our natural selves without being made to feel like outcasts. For many of us, Black is a permanent state and not a fad."

-Above passages excerpted from "Cleopatra Wore Cornrows. Why Can't We?" by Jamala Rogers, which appears on pages 14 and 15 of the Jan. 31 edition of UNITY.

Back In Time

(Harriet) Tubman was around 15 years old when the incident that literally marked her for life occurrred. While trying to defend a fellow slave from the vindictiveness of the overseer, she was struck on the head with a two-pound iron weight which cracked her skull. For months she lingered between life and death, lying on rags in her family's slave cabin. The injury left a deep scar on her head and left her subject to spells of unconsciousness, sometimes three or four times a day, which plagued her for the rest of her life.

But instead of being crushed by the brutality of her life, Tubman hardened and determined to fight. When she recovered, she built up her physical strength until she could lift huge barrels of produce as well as a man, despite her small size. Her master would exhibit her strength as one of the "sights" of the plantation. She let people think her half-witted because of her brain injury, and plotted her escape. She began to experience daily visions, which inspired her driving commitment to black freedom as part of a deeply personal religion.

In 1849, although it meant leaving her husband, a freeman who refused to go with her, Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery. Rumor had reached her and her family that their owners planned to sell them to the Deep South, a dreaded fear of every slave in the border states. Already two of her sisters had been sent off in a chain gang, separated from their children. Her brothers lost courage for the escape; Tubman went on alone. As she later told *Bradford: "I had reasoned this out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a right to, liberty, or death; if I could not have one, I would have the other; for no man should take me alive; I should fight for my liberty as long as my strength lasted, and when the time came for me to go, the Lord would let them take me."

*Sarah Bradford, Harriet's biographer and author of HARRIET TUBMAN THE MOSES OF HER PEOPLE.

-Source: BLACK HISTORY AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE #5
a Spartacist Pamphlet, Feb., 1988

Announcements

The Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization expresses its sincere appreciation to the members of the University of Nebraska at Omaha Black Studies Department who participated in our Feb. 23 African History program, as well as to those members of the 37th St. Church of Christ singers who made it down and lightened our spirits with the gift of their songs.

The Black Research Organization Network has been established to store and share information about African and African-American issues and concerns. The project, based at Medgar Evers College, will develp a database of materials and services developed by research centers in the U.S. and Canada. For details, contact Prof. Yvonne Bennett, Library, Medgar Evers College, CUNY, 1150 Carroll St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11225. Telephone: (718) 735-1750.

The Dancing Masks of African Literature is the theme of the thirteenth annual African Literature Association Conference, to be held at the University of Pittsburgh on April 6-9. For information, contact Planning Committee, ALA Conference, 3T01 Forbes Quadrangle, Pittsburgh, PA 15260. Telephone: (414) 648-7540.

ASSATA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY is Assata Shakur's story of her personal and political development. It is available from Lawrence Hill Publishing.

Basketball

by Mondo

man a come out widda rag
to sop up de puddles a sweat
drip droppy ina flood
from de men stanna so high
make a you wonder what kinda de mud
god molda deez men from
deez tree limb arm
an log laig warriors a crashin
ina mid air high above
de zebra men widda whistles cocked to blow
ana eart shakin boom
when deez titans come a down
an feet hit de flo
ana you watch deez men wid yo eyes
a bulgin so big space a wide
an astoundament rushin roun inside a ya
like a de flowers ina rush to bus troo
de tremblin soil afta de spring rains come
ana somebody lose
somebody win
it make a no difference anyway
when you getta de big kick
justa watch de giants play.